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Review #5

Compston, C., & Seidman, R.F. (Eds.). (2003). *Our documents: 100 milestone documents from the National Archives*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

*Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives* contains 100 of the most important documents in the history of the United States of America. Each section on a document includes background information on the document, providing some context for the document and its’ place in history. There is a picture of the original document and text of each document. Some of the documents included are: Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, Emancipation Proclamation, Act Establishing Yellowstone National Park, Truman Doctrine, and Civil Rights Act. Each of the documents presents a unique moment in our history. The background information does not go too in depth, but it is just enough to understand what was going on when each document was created and what happened because of the document. The companion website, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/index.php?flash=true&>, is a great website that allows online access to most of the documents in the book as well as teaching ideas.

In the classroom, each piece in this collection is useful in and of itself. When taken as an entire collection or even pieces of the collection, the uses in the classroom abound. The documents included can help students capture a snapshot of what was going on in the country. Primary documents can be used as a tool for teaching students how to research, how to identify important moments in history, and how to synthesize information. Primary documents help students understand the different perspectives through which history can be viewed.

Creative Ideas for using Primary Documents:

**Exhibition Curator**

Choose a theme. Create a classroom exhibition or bulletin board to explore the theme with a variety of primary sources. Use oral history quotations for the labels.

**Gallery Walk**

Post a series of primary sources on the wall with a set of questions at each station. Move from station to station in groups to answer the questions at each station. Continue the walk until everyone has had a chance to work with all the sources.

**Information Age**

Some cultures have relied on oral tradition as the primary means of communication; others, letter writing; some email. Investigate how people have recorded and shared information in other times and places. How do you communicate? What evidence will remain for historians of the future? Illustrate your findings on a map or timeline.

**Newspaper Reporter**

Extrapolate the five "W" questions from a primary source. Use the answers to write a lead paragraph for a news story.

**Time Capsule**

Create a time capsule to represent life today. Select objects, documents, pictures and other sources that could teach people in the future about what life is like today.

**"What is it?" Game**

Create a source box filled with primary and secondary resources. Sort them into primary and secondary sources. This activity can be done as a relay race.

**Who is it?**

Ask a group of teachers to create a bag of primary sources from their lives (one per teacher). Students can work in groups to match the bag with the teacher and draw conclusions about the person based on the sources. Share and justify the conclusions. Use this as a way to introduce the different types of primary sources.

**DOCUMENTS**

A Family Manuscript Bring in a diary, letter or other document from home. Examine each to personalize and find out more about a particular event or time period.

**Document Comparison**

Identify the purpose of specific documents and compare them to one another (e.g. Charter of Rights and Freedoms, British North America Act, etc.).

**English Professor**

Look at an old document (a letter, diary, etc.) as an example of writing. Critique it. Is it an example of good writing? Grade it according to today's standards. How do you think language has changed?

**Fact vs. Fiction**

Use primary sources to authenticate the information and storyline in a work of historical fiction. The book's bibliography will provide sources useful for authentication. How would you change the novel to make it more historically accurate?

**Family Tree**

Interview family members and examine family documents (e.g. your baby book) to construct a family tree.

**Found Poem**

Create a "found poem" with excerpts from an oral history or document. Everyone should work with the same source. Ask each student to jot down the four most poignant phrases from the source on large strips of paper. Work together in groups to combine the phrases into a poem. If more than one person selects the same line, it might be used as a title or refrain.

**Letters Home**

Read and analyze letters about a topic from two opposing viewpoints. Describe the differences and similarities in the information and the opinions they convey.

**Eyewitness News**

Choose an event or time period that all students have witnessed. Ask each person to write an account of the event. Compare them to find the differences and similarities in accounts. See how differing perspectives affect how people view and record an event.

**Voices**

Read a speech from the past to introduce a new unit.

**Pen Pals**

Explore the value of letters as primary sources by writing to a pen pal. Explore ways to use the Internet to partner with a class in another region of the country or the world on a pen pal program.

**An Ensemble of Voices**

Divide into groups "expert groups" and assign each group a source with a different account of the same event or time period to study using a series of guide questions. Then move to "discussion groups;" each discussion group should include a student from each one of the "expert groups." Share information from the different primary sources and, as a group, develop generalizations about the event or time period using all sources.

**Voice from the Past**

To help students decipher the handwriting in old letters, diaries, and other documents, make a tape recording of the document you will be studying. As students listen to the recording, have them follow the wording of the document.

**Walk a Mile in Another Person's Shoes**

Choose a person, country, or idea to represent in a discussion of a particular issue. Examine a primary source from that person, country, or idea and use it to prepare a position statement for a debate, talk show or presentation.

**What's Your Line?**

Choose a quotation or idea from a famous figure in history to stimulate a position-taking activity or a debate on a particular issue in history.

**MAPS**

**Cartographer's Comparison**

Compare a recent and an historic map of a particular place to see how the place has evolved over time.

**Walking to School**

Create a primary source to document your own community. Make a map of your walk or ride to school. What do you pass along the way? How far do you travel? What route do you take? What are the strengths and weaknesses of maps as sources of information about the past?

From: http://www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher\_resources/ps\_using.html